

# CHRISTOLOGIES AMONG THE CHRISTIANS OF NDIA IN KIRINYAGA WEST SUB-COUNTY OF KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

*The study evaluated Christologies among the Christians of Ndia, Kirinyaga West sub-county, Kenya. The objectives of the study were: to explore ontological Christologies; to investigate popular soteriological Christologies; to establish social, political and economic functional Christologies among Ndia Christians and; to examine the question of Christodicy in Ndia Christianity. 232 Christians were randomly selected to participate in the study. Questionnaires were issued to the participants. A 95.45% response rate was realized. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The data showed that ontological Christologies among the Ndia Christians ignored the humanity of Jesus and elevated him to the position of the traditional Gikuyu deity, Ngai, while soteriological Christologies were well balanced. Functional Christologies and the question of Christodicy were too spiritualized and Satan was given too prominent a position such that devil worship could result from glorification of Satan as a very powerful being who is able to oppose and cause Jesus to fail in his duties. The study recommends that churches in Ndia should teach sound doctrinal positions emphasizing on the humanity of Jesus, encourage people to appreciate the relationship between work and wealth and medicine and healing, avoid giving Satan a prominent position and to reinterpret the Gikuyu deity, Ngai, to take the place of God-the-Father as opposed to the place of God-the-Son for construction of a “wholesome” Gikuyu theology. The study will be useful to social workers, scholars, churches and government agencies working with the Ndia.*

**Keywords;** Popular, Christologies, Ontological, Soteriological, Functional Background to the Study

## INTRODUCTION

Christology is primarily concerned with understanding of the nature and person of Jesus, first as it was recorded in The Bible and then as understood by Christians today, which raises the issues of popular versus official Christology. Basically, the concerns about who Jesus is and what he does are the main areas illuminated upon in Christological studies.

The Christological question is simply “whom say the people that I am?” (Luke 9: 18b King James 2000 Bible). The question was asked by Jesus himself. Jesus then asked

Peter; “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered: “The Christ of God” (Luke 9: 20). The first question, “who do people say I am?” (Luke 19: 18), forms the earliest traceable hint of popular Christologies.

Jesus was popularly understood differently even when he was here on earth. Some said he was John the Baptist; others said he was Elijah and still others, that he was one of the “prophets of long ago” who had come back to life (Luke 19: 19).

During the apostolic age the apostle Paul provided the major component of

Christology. Paul's central themes were the notion of the pre-existence of Christ and the worship of Christ as *Kyrios* (Greek; Lord) (Bowder, 1975). Paul's arguments indicate that he was out to rectify particular false popular beliefs about Christ. In Philippians 2: 7 Paul provides us with a glimpse of his understanding of Christ. According to Paul, Jesus was in the form of God but he took the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

Debates in church history concerning the works of Jesus Christ indicate the search of popular Christologies from which systematic theology could be constructed. Politics behind all church councils that came up with church doctrines concerning the Christ's person and event indicate that popularity and politics influenced the construction of church doctrines more than did scripture and revelation.

Hard positions adopted by the Church over the centuries have ensured that personal beliefs about Christ by individual Christians do not enter the formal realms. However, through contextual theologies community aspirations that reflect people's ideas about Christ have in the recent past been constructed. The African church in particular has benefited from contextual theologies through adoption of African musical tunes in the church, African dressing styles even among the clergy, architectural designs in church building that are African; use of African languages in the church and ecumenical cooperation between African independent and Western Missionary oriented churches. According to Setiloane (1991: 12) the task of African theology "is to grapple seriously with the Central question of Christology".

Mugambi (1989) states that the Christian Gospel ought to make African Christians to live more as Africans. Borrowing from Cone (1971) Mugambi points out that the norm of African Christian theology cannot and should not be determined or defined by anyone else but Africans who have experienced the power of

the Christian Gospel. Mbiti (2003) argues that African theology is both Christian and African.

Among the Agikuyu the contextualization of the Gospel can be traced from the 1920's when independent churches emerged in Central Kenya. African Christians felt that they needed to live the faith in their own way. Some defected from the Western missionary oriented churches and founded African Churches. Wachege (1992) has tried to construct a Gikuyu Christology based on the theme of Muthamaki (ideal elder) based on the popular life of the Agikuyu. A keen listener of the Agikuyu as they mention God in their everyday life discovers that there exists several, sometimes conflicting, popular Christologies among the Agikuyu.

Formal theological constructions in the African church fit into existing doctrinal teaching borrowed from the Western (Latin speaking) and Eastern (Greek speaking) traditions. They do not question the laid down doctrines except at the popular and informal level. They are thus scholarly and only understood by the elite. There exists various popular and informal theological constructions among ordinary Christians. These popular theologies are mostly Christological in nature and are opposed to the Biblical teaching which is held as the foundation of the Christian.

The study sought to evaluate popular ontological, Soteriological and functional Christological constructions and the question of Christodicy among the Christians of Ndia, Kirinyaga West Sub-County, Kenya. The study sought to achieve the following objectives: (1) To explore the existing popular Ontological Christologies constructed by the Christians of Ndia. (2) To evaluate popular soteriological Christologies formulated by the Christians of Ndia. (3) To establish the social, political and economic functional Christologies formed by the Christians of Ndia. (4) To examine the question of Christodicy of Christodicy among the Christians of Ndia. Then, the study was guided by the following questions: (1) Which are the

popular Ontological Christologies constructed by Christians of Ndia? (2) What popular soteriological Christologies are formulated by the Christians of Ndia? (3) What are the social, political and economic functional Christologies formed by the Christians of Ndia? (4) What is the level of Christodicy among the Christians of Ndia?

Review of available literature on Christology showed that very few studies had been conducted on popular Christology. It was thus important that this original research work was undertaken so that others may be able to replicate it in different parts of the world. Several generalizations could also be made from the findings of this study because Christology is a universal subject.

To the Christians of Ndia specifically the study has both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, the study contributes to the advancement of knowledge about the social life of the Christians of Ndia while practically; the study findings will lead to the improvement of strategies for construction of contextual theologies by the churches operating among the Christians of Ndia. Missionaries, Scholars of religion and philosophy, churches and government agencies will find information generated by this study useful for their operations among the people of Ndia or wherever replication and generalization of the findings of this study will be applied. Business people and entrepreneurs targeting the Ndia Market will too find the information useful.

The study was based on the following three assumptions: *first*, the respondents would offer honest and reliable responses. *Second*, people found in a church service would be Christians. *Third*, respondents found in Ndia churches would be Ndia Christians.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The study was carried out among the Christians of Ndia, Kirinyaga County, Kenya. For more conclusive results all Christians in

the Ndia region would need to have been studied. However, due to the high population of Ndia which according to the 2009 census stood at 135,337, this was not possible. The study limited itself to only the faithful within churches operational in Ndia. It is notable that there could be many dwellers of Ndia who were Christians but did not go to church and even others who may not be Christian but influenced formulation of Christology. There also existed home churches that did not meet at specific places. Other churches in the interior were not traceable.

The study adopted a theoretical framework based on the praxis model as exemplified by Bevens (2005). The praxis model presupposes an acceptance of Christ's presence in a culture. It recognizes the importance of culture in developing an understanding of Christ, and perceives revelation "as God's presence and action in history -in the events of everyday life of a people- in social and economic systems, in situations of suffering and struggle for liberation" (Bevens, 2005: 15). By the praxis model, theology is done in a manner that involves "Seeing analytically, judging theologically, and acting pastorally, three faces in one commitment in faith" (Boff, 1988: 12).

The study adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design in the investigation of popular Christologies among the Agikuyu of Ndia, Kirinyaga West Sub-County of Kenya. According to Kothari (2003) descriptive surveys allow the researcher to describe, record, analyze and report conditions that exist without altering the variables.

The target population of the study is the Christian community of Ndia in Kirinyaga West Sub-County of Kenya. The population was composed of 25 Catholic, 29 Anglican, six Lutheran, six Presbyterian, 40 Pentecostal and ten Afro-Pentecostal congregations. The study was conducted among the Christians of Ndia in Kirinyaga West Sub-County of Kenya between October 2015 and August 2016.

Sampling involved a process of selecting a sub-section of population that represented the entire population in order to obtain information regarding the phenomena of interest. A sample of 232 Christians was selected to participate in the study. Any statement made about the sample is assumed to be true of the whole population (Orodho: 2002).

The main tool of this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire had five (5) sections. Section one was used to collect background information such as age, sex, education, theological education, frequency of church attendance. Section two helped to explore popular understanding of Christ. Section three evaluated the respondents' soteriological formulation of Christologies. Section 4 helped to establish functional Christologies. Section five helped in examinations of the question of Christodicy among the Christians of Ndia.

Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Ary, Jacobs and Razavieh: 1972). To ensure that the items in the questionnaire represented the content area that they were to measure, they were given to two other experts to help determine face and content validity. The experts are highly trained and experienced in research and supervision of postgraduate students. Their comments were incorporated in the instruments in order to make the instruments more effective.

Reliability is the extent to which a measuring device is consistent in measuring whatever it measures (Mugenda Mugenda, 2003). A reliable instrument is free from measurement errors. The less the random error, the higher the reliability. Test-retest method was applied to ten faithfuls who did not form part of the true sample. This test-retest technique involved administration of the same instrument to the same respondents at different points in time. The scores were then be correlated using parsons correlation formula. A correlation coefficient of 0,91 was achieved which indicated a high reliability going by the

recommendation of Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh (1972). Had the correlation coefficient had been lower than 0,7 the instruments would have been corrected and pretested until an acceptable score was achieved.

The researcher exhaustively skimmed through any literature appropriate to popular Christologies in general and Ndia Christologies in particular and sought any other available information on the subject from the internet, Karatina University library and scholars, church leaders, and Christian faithfuls in Ndia before embarking on primary data collection. Appointment with church leaders, elders and pastors –were booked and permission to interview the members of their churches within the church precincts sought before commencement of interviews and issuance of questionnaires.

Data analysis involved coding, classification and tabulation of collected data so that they were amenable to analysis. This helped to ensure that the data were accurate, consistent with other facts collected and well arranged to facilitate coding and tabulation. Coding involved assigning numerals to answers so that responses were put into limited numbers of categories or classes appropriate to the assessment of popular Christologies among the Agikuyu of Ndia and the social, economic and political factors responsible for their formulations. Classification involved arranging data in groups or classes on the basis of characteristics. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and means were used to convey the essential characteristics of the data interpreted. Frequency distribution tables, pie charts and bar graphs and pie charts were used in data presentation. Once the findings were established, conclusions and recommendations made.

As a fundamental policy the researcher endeavored to remain ethical in conducting the research. The opinions of the respondents were respected and total confidentiality upheld

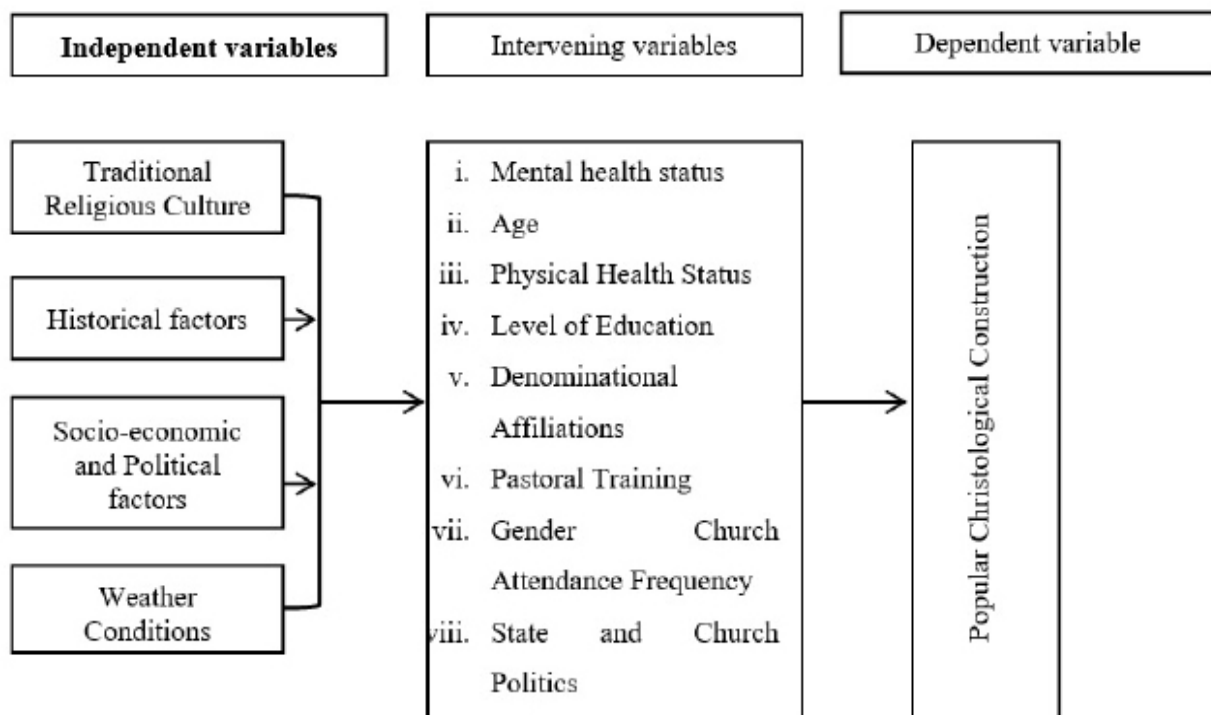


by the researcher. There was a confidentiality clause in the research instruments. Any clarification sought by the respondents was promptly given. The respondents were required to volunteer to participate in the study. Emergentethical issues were strictly upheld in line with academic, moral and Christian judgement.

In terms of theoretical framework, A certain conceptual framework was developed to guide the study. Construction of popular Christologies which is the dependent variable could be affected by parameters such as social, political, economic and even historical as well as climatic factors. The effect

of the independent variables could be influenced by other factors such as people's mental health status, physical health denominational affiliations, pastoral training, levels of education, church attendance frequency, gender and age. The interaction between the independent and interviewing variables and between the interviewing variables themselves could affect the dependent variable. This was controlled by incorporating pastors, both gender and all adults in the study while ensuring that all denominations were represented and those instruments (questionnaires) were given to the seemingly healthy.

**Figure 1**  
Conceptual Framework



## RESULT OF THE STUDY

Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The response rate is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Response Rate

Respondents	Issued Questionnaires	Questionnaires Responded to	Percentage (%)
Pastors	12	12	100
Other Faithfuls	220	200	90,9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>95,45</b>

Out of the questionnaires issued by the researcher, a response rate of 100% for the pastors and 90,9% among other faithfuls was achieved. The high response rate is explained by the fact that the researcher issued the questionnaires and collected them as soon as the respondents filled.

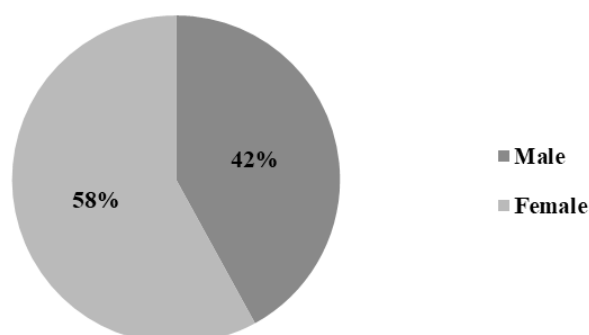
## Demographic Analysis of the Respondents

To understand the composition and background details of the respondents, in order to qualify their responses as dependable or not the study sought some background information.

### Gender of the Respondents

The participants indicated their gender as summarized in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
Gender of Respondent

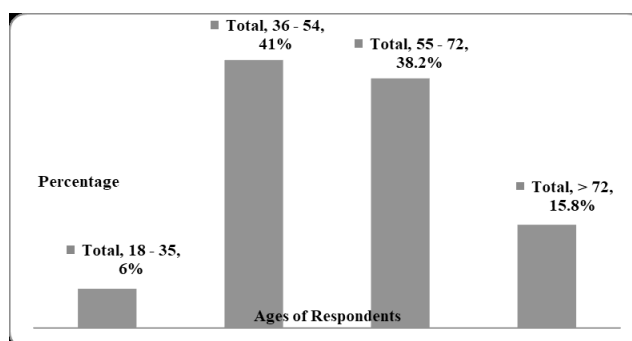


The collected data indicated that 42% of the respondents were male whereas 58% were female. This discrepancy is explained by the fact that there were more female faithfuls in the churches of Ndia than male faithfuls. This means the gender disparity in Ndia churches agrees with the global figures which indicate that a ratio of 2:3 of male to female church goers exist (Harris, 2011).

### Age of Respondents

The respondents were asked to indicate their age. This was aimed at assisting the researcher to gauge the level of confidence to place on the responses given by the study respondents. Figure 3 shows a summary of the age of the respondents

**Figure 3**  
Age of Respondents



The data in Figure 3 shows that 6% of the respondents were aged between 18 – 35, 41% were between 36 and 54 years of age, 38,2% were 55 – 72 years of age while 15,8% were above 73 years of age. The data agrees with the statistics of church attendance of the Church of England which shows that the average age of the church goers was 61 (Beckford, 2010). The variance between the attendance in Ndia and the statistics of the Church of England figures 2010 may be explained by the fact Ndia figures take into account all the denominations while the Church of England figures are confined to the Anglican Church population and in a different continent with a different culture. The low population of the youthful church goers may be explained by the fact that many young people prefer going to non-formal and interdenominational fellowships which meet in home.

### Academic Qualifications

Participants were asked to indicate their highest academic qualifications. The purpose was to help in assessment of the level of intervention of education on popular Christological formulations. Tables 2 and 3 summarize responses on academic qualifications

**Table 2:** Non-pastoral Faithfuls Academic Qualifications.

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No Schooling at all	21	10,5
Lower Primary	46	23
(Elementary level)		
Upper Primary	93	46,5
(Intermediary level)		
Secondary	32	16
Post-Secondary	8	4
Total	200	100

The data in Table 2 shows that 10,5% of the non-pastoral faithful had no schooling at all, 23% and 46,5% had lower and upper primary education respectively while 16% and 4% had Secondary and Post-Secondary education respectively. The data showed that majority of church goers did not have high academic qualifications. This may explain why televangelists are able to influence people's behavior.

**Table 3** Pastoral Faithfuls Theological Qualifications

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	3	25
Certificate	3	25
Diploma	4	33,3
Degree	2	16,6
Post-graduate	-	-
Total	200	100

The data in Table 3 shows that 25% of pastors had no theological training, while another 25% held certificates in theological studies, 33,3% and 16,6% held diplomas and undergraduate degrees respectively. There was no pastor with post-graduate training. The levels of theological training compares well with low levels of secular education.

### Popular Ontological Christologies

The study objective was to explore ontological Christologies constructed by the Christians of Ndia. Christians were asked who Jesus is. Table 4 shows their responses.

**Table 4** Popular Ontological Christologies

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Jesus is God	102	48,1
Jesus is the Son of God	37	17,4
Jesus is an ancestor	3	1,41
Jesus is King	1	0,47
Jesus is a spirit	2	0,94
Jesus is unknowable	56	26,4
Jesus life	-	-
Total	212	100

The data in table 4 shows that 48,1% of the faithfuls regard Jesus as God, 17,4 % refer to Jesus as Son God, 1,41% refer to Jesus as an ancestor, 0,47% perceives Jesus as King, and 0,94% indicated that Jesus was a spirit while 26,4% indicated that Jesus was unknowable.

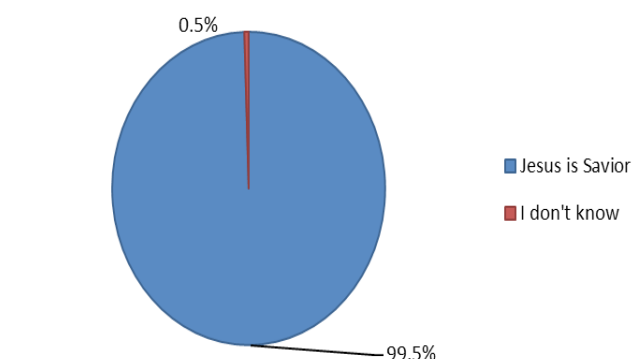
5,8% perceive Jesus as life itself. The high perception of the deity of Jesus and the seemingly contradictory but equally high perception of Jesus as unknowable finds agreement with the traditional Agikuyu concept of *Ngai* (God). *Ngai* is so near yet so far, he is known but also "unknown" at the same time. In that he is not unnecessarily disturbed and human intellect is too feeble to comprehend who *Ngai* is (Kenyatta, 1989). The Son of God perception may have arisen from the official church dogma.

The low level of perception of Jesus as King could be explained by the fact that the Agikuyu are a decentralized community where the idea of a king is foreign. The President in modern times who comes close to a king is regarded as an equal human being only holding a big office. This finding largely contradicts Wachege (1992) where he attempted to construct a Gikuyu contextual Christology around the Muthamaki (King) concept. The ancestor concept of Jesus agrees with Uchema's argument that Jesus can be regarded as an ancestor without contradicting the scriptures and history of the church (Ezeh, 2003). Jesus's perceptions as a spirit and as life itself are functional aspects that have been personified.

### Popular Soteriological Christologies

The study sought to investigate popular soteriological Christology among the Christians of Ndia. Respondents were asked whether they regarded Jesus as their savior. The participants were to state why they regarded or did not regard Jesus as savior too. Figure 4 illustrates their response.

**Figure 4**  
Jesus is Savior



Data in figure 4 shows that 99,5% agreed that Jesus was their savior. Only 0,5% did not indicate the salvific perception of Christ. Even then, the 0,5% did not deny that Jesus was savior. They only indicated that they did not know whether Jesus was their savior. These findings sharply contradict sermons over television, crusades and even within churches where Christians are called forward to accept Jesus as their savior. The findings indicate that they regarded Jesus as their savior regardless of their denominations' perception of "salvation"

The participants were asked to give reasons for their answers to the question on whether Jesus was savior. Even those who had indicated that they did not know whether Jesus was their savior stated ways in which Jesus saved people.

**Table 5** Why Jesus is Savior or is not savior

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Saved me from Sin	151	71,22
Saved from poverty	16	7,54
Saved me disease	27	12,73
Saved us from white man	9	4,24
Saved us from dictatorship	-	-
Is not my savior	0	0
Total	212	100

The data in table 5 shows that 71,22 % indicated that Christ saved them from sin. 7,54% indicated that Jesus saved them from poverty while 12,73% indicated that they were saved from disease with 4,24 % indicating that they were saved from the Whiteman. Another 4,24% indicated that they were saved from authoritarian rule. None indicated that Jesus was not a savior. The perception that Jesus was a Savior from sin maybe explained by the predominant teaching in the church that Jesus came as a spiritual Messiah to rescue people from the bondage of sin. It can also be related to the Agikuyu traditional teaching that Ngai, whose identity has been taken by Jesus as illustrated in table 3 on ontological perception of Jesus, plays the important role of ensuring the sustenance of life and ecological wholesomeness (Kenyatta, 1989, Mbiti, 1969). The Bible too teaches that Jesus is a savior from sin. The response that Jesus saved

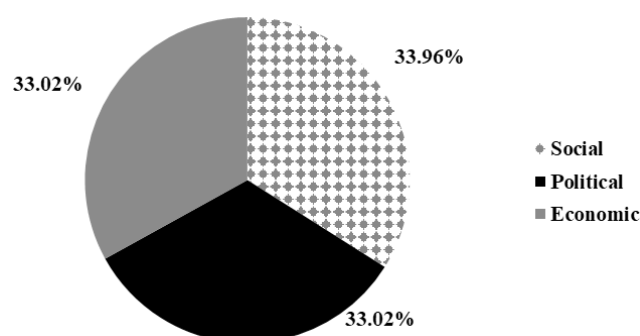
respondents from poverty and disease agrees with Moltman (1992) in that Christology must confront the misery of the present with the salvation that Christ brings presenting it as a salvation that heals. Salvation from dictatorship and from the white man was interpreted to mean salvation from authoritarian rule of KANU and former president Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi and colonial subjugation. Much of the Ndia people suffering experience are blamed on the poverty and hardship that arose from the detention of able bodied men during the MAUMAU war of liberation and also on the fact that most descendants of MAUMAU warriors suffered illiteracy, landlessness and mockery from the privileged children of home guards and other aids of colonial masters.

Liberative concepts of Christ in Ndia find agreement with Mbiti's (1963) argument that the African Spirituality, which in this case is Ndia Christianity, cannot be separated from the physical universe. Ndia people attribute all good things to Jesus' favor. The concept of liberisation and Christ controlled destiny also agrees with the Turaki (2001) who argues that the concept of reality and destiny are deeply rooted in the spirit world. Thus Ndia Christianity serves both in the physical world of social and political realities and in the metaphysical world of the unseen spirits

## Popular Functional Christologies

The study sought to establish popular functional Christologies formulated by the Agikuyu of Ndia. Respondents were asked to state what Christ did for them and for others beyond saving them and promising them a better home paradise. The responses given were categorized into three: social, political and economic functional Christologies.

**Figure 5**





Data collected indicates that out of the functional Christologies 33,03%, 33, 96% and 33,01% were Economic, social and political respectively.

This data indicates that the balance of life among Ndia Christians where society politics and economies are equally influences by the religious faith. These findings agree with Kenyatta (1989) that the political, social, economic and religious life of the Agikuyu is intertwined. The findings disagree with Mbiti's (1969) assertion that Africans are notoriously religious. The data shows that Ndia Christians are influenced by religion in all spheres of life.

72 respondents equivalent to 33,96% of the sample gave social functional social Christologies. Tables 6 show a summary of these responses

**Table 6.** Social Functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cleanser	1	1,38
Destiny Leader	1	1,38
Giver of Faith	9	12,5
Defeater of Enemies	17	23,61
Marriage Holder	28	38,8
Giver of Children	9	12,5
Giver of Peace	-	-
Giver of Humidity	1	1,38
Giver of Wisdom	-	-
Total	72	100

Data in table 6 shows that 38,8% of respondents who indicated social functional Christologies regarded Jesus as a holder of marriages. 23,61% regarded Jesus as defeater of their enemies while 12,5% regarded Jesus as a giver of faith. Another 12,5% indicated that Jesus gave them children. 6,94% stated that Jesus gave them peace. 13,8% perceived Jesus as their cleanser from their spiritual uncleanliness. 13,8% indicated that Jesus was a giver of humility. Another 1,38% said Jesus was their destiny leader. Another 1,38% indicated that Jesus gave them wisdom. The data indicates the importance of marriage among the Ndia Christians. The high number of Christologies indicating that Jesus was their defender indicates the competitiveness of the Ndia Agikuyu in farming business, politics and in the amassing of wealth. The "defeater of enemies" Christology may also have arisen from the fear of witchcraft which is

unpopular among the people of Agikuyu of Ndia and their neighbors Mbeere and Akamba. It is worth noting that there was no feminine Christology considering that 58% of the respondents were female. Feminist Theologian Mercy Odugoye who indicates that feminism is not a word for the female gender but is a mixture of things, values and temperaments dichotomized into feminine and masculine. (Odugoye, 1982). Women of Ndia who are traditionally and culturally respected regard themselves as people and Christians and feminism to them only suggests natural and unique strengths of women as opposed to struggle against masculinity. The conception of Jesus as the giver of humility, wisdom, cleanliness and destiny may have scores so lowly probably because once soteriology need is achieved is given it is assumed that personality traits are no longer supported by data on popular soteriological Christologies summarized in Table 5.

70 respondents comprising 33,02% of the sample gave political functional Christologies on the role of Christ. Table 7 summarizes their responses.

**Table 7:** Political functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Fighter Bull (Fights for me)	52	74,28
Fighter Cock (Fights others for me)	6	8,5
Kingmaker (Makes me King)	1	1,42
Chairperson (Makes me glorious and important)	1	1,42
Remover of poor leaders from power	12	17,14
Total	70	100

The data in Table 7 shows that 74,28% of the respondents indicated political functional Christologies perceived Jesus as a fighter cock. 17,14 % stated that Jesus was a remover of poor leaders from power while 1,42% regarded Jesus as a maker of leaders. Another 14,2% regarded Jesus as chairperson who makes them important.

The perception of Jesus as a fighter bull and a fighter cock must be an influence from the Luhya culture of Western Kenya where bull and cock fight games are favorite sport. Many Ndia residents have interacted with the Abaluhya through education, business, intermarriages, sports and politics.

The perception of Christ as the one who removes poor leaders from power agrees with soteriological Christologies as summarized in Table 8 where Jesus is regarded as a savior from dictatorship and colonialism.

The kingmaker and chairperson perception were probably not popular. This is probably because the Agikuyu are traditionally a decentralized community where the idea a human being rulings the rest is foreign.

The fighter bull removes poor leaders from power and reconstructs the society. The findings indicate that Reconstructionist ideologists such as Mugambi (1995) have already been overtaken by popular theological formulations that are able to combine both liberative and Reconstructionist views and apply them to actual day-to-day survival.

33,03% of the respondents gave economic functional Christologies when asked to state the role of Christ in their life. Table 8 shows a summary of the responses indicating economic functional Christologies,

**Table 8** Economic Functional Christologies

Christology	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Destroyer/ Eradicator of Famine/Hunger (Giver of food)	3	4,28
Giver of rain/ rainmaker	2	2,86
Blessor/Giver of the soil	1	1,43
Grower of maize and beans	1	1,43
Keeper of animal/ livestock	-	-

Destroyer/ Eradicator of poverty (Giver of property and money	62	88,57
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>

The data in Table 8 shows that the 70 respondents who gave economic functional Christologies, 88,57% stated that Christ destroyed poverty, gave them property and money to them and the others. 4,28% stated that Christ provided them with food or destroyed hunger. 2,86% indicated that Jesus gave them rain while 1,43% indicated that Christ gave them soil. 1,43% also indicated that Christ was the grower of maize and beans and another 1,43% also said that Jesus was the keeper of livestock.

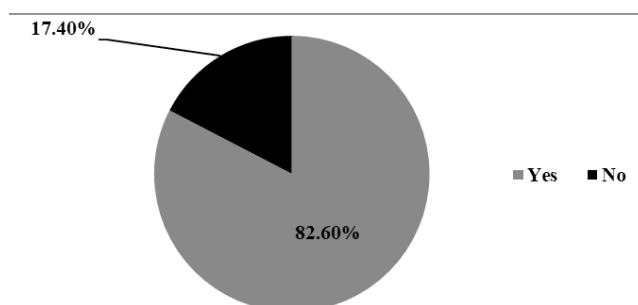
The findings indicates that prosperity is an important concern for the people of Ndia Christians. This could be explained by the fact that land which used to be the main source if wealth has been so much sub-divided to an extent that agriculture as the main economic activity is under a threat. Coffee, tea and horticulture prices keep fluctuating and joblessness affects both the youth and the elderly. Poverty is a risk among the Ndia people face. The rest of the economic functional Christologies revolve around the issue of food security and agriculture.

The findings indicate that an agriculturalist Christ who is concerned with people's wellbeing and provides wealth could be welcome among the Agikuyu of Ndia. These findings agree with Kenyatta (1989) who indicates that Agikuyu land and agriculture cannot be divorced from the religious, social and political events. Though Kenyatta (1989) wrote in the 1930's the situation remains largely the same despite the various changes in politics, governance, economics and technology.

### Christodicy

The final objective of this study was to examine the question of Christodicy among the Agikuyu of Ndia. Respondents were asked if Jesus had ever failed them or others known to them, how the failure was and why Jesus failed them or others they knew. Figure 6 summarizes the findings on the failure of Jesus to perform

**Figure 6**  
 Failure and refusal of Jesus to perform



The data in figure 6 shows that 17,4% of respondents stated that Christ had never failed them and others while 82,6% indicated that Christ had either failed them or others. The divergent views of the Christians on failure or refusal of Jesus to perform may arise from different perceptions of Jesus held by believers. Table 9 summarizes the types of failure and refusals by Jesus to perform as expected.

**Table 9.** Types of Failure or Refusal by Jesus to Perform

Reason	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Death of a loved one	74	42,2
Failure in examinations	28	16,0
Lack of food	2	1,14
Failure to give riches	63	36,0
Failure to defeat enemies	4	1,14
Failure to win all to church	2	1,14
Prolonged sickness	2	1,14
Total	175	100

The data in Table 9 shows 42,2% of the respondents who had been failed by Jesus were failed when their loved ones died. 16% were failed when they failed in their examinations. 1,14% experienced failure when they lacked food and 36% when they could not get the riches. 1,24% stated that Jesus failed when they were unable to defeat their enemies. Another 1,14% indicated that Jesus failed them when they suffered prolonged illness. Another 1,14% indicated that Jesus failed or refused when people failed to join the church.

The types of failure indicated can be understood by assessing Christological assumptions of the respondents. The functional and soteriological Christologies are expectations

of Christ/If any function ascribed him fails, the question of Christodicy arises. Ontologically, Jesus is regarded as God among the Agikuyu people. (Table 4). God cannot possibly fail and therein lies in the question of theodicy and Christodicy. These findings of a failing Christ compare well with Biblical teachings and stories where God magnifies himself in situations of failure or where Christ dies on the cross in apparent defeat. However it is through death that resurrection finds meaning. There is no resurrection that is not preceded by death and there is no victory without a threat of defeat. Table 10 is a summary of the reasons Jesus failed or refused to perform.

**Table 10** Reasons for Christ's Failure or Refusal to Perform

Reason	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Satan's power	126	72,0
Lack of Faith	8	4,57
Need for patience	9	5,14
Wrong request/ wrong motive	7	4,0
Syncretism	-	-
Laziness by Christians	11	6,29
Total	175	100

The data in Table 10 shows that 72% of the respondents who indicated that Jesus failed them or refused to perform as expected because of Satan's power while 4,57% blamed it on lack of faith. 5,17% blamed it on impatience on the part of Christians while 4% indicated that Jesus failed of refused requests due to wrong motives in prayer. 8,0% stated that syncretism was to blame and 6,29% laid the blame on laziness by Christians.

An interesting finding was conspicuous; all who indicated that Jesus had failed them or refused to perform had an answer for the failure or refusal. This finding agrees with Mbiti (1969) and Kenyatta (1989) who assert that Africans (Mbiti, 1969) in general and Agikuyu (Kenyatta, 1989) in particular draw ready answers to difficult questions which would otherwise be unanswerable from religion.

Satan's power which is blamed for 72% of failures of Jesus to perform as expected

finds agreement with the Biblical teachings of the power of Satan Genesis where Satan is presented as a serpent that makes the first human beings to disobey God. Satan is also seen tempting Jesus to disobey God in the Gospels. Pauline and General epistles warn Christians against the power of Satan and Revelations to John presents a very powerful Satan who is finally defeated by the more powerful Christ and is eventually chained so that he does not continue challenging God. Though the figure of Satan as a very powerful being lacks in the Agikuyu traditional religion, evil forces are believed to exist and are blamed for all bad things that happen in the society. When Christianity arrived in Gikuyu land, these evils spirits were said to be Satan's powers. Good forces that helped people and brought good things were, with the coming of Christianity, regarded as angels while Jesus became the *New Ngai* in popular Christological and theological constructions. This is supported by our findings summarized in Table 3 on popular ontological Christologies.

There are some points to be clearly affirmed that:

1. Popular Ontological Christologies among Ndia Christians ignore the humanity of Jesus and overly elevate the divinity of Christ so that Jesus has taken the place of the traditional Gikuyu God, Ngai, which is not Biblically correct.
2. Popular Soteriological Christologies among the Ndia Christians are well-balanced since Christ saved people from both spiritual and physical bondage and agree with Biblical teachings.
3. Popular Functional Christologies among the Christians of Ndia portray a people who are too dependent on religion for all their needs which though Biblically correct may not serve the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which are based on ideas that were unimaginable in Biblical times.
4. Christodicy among the Ndia Christians is blamed on Satan and human beings while Jesus Christ himself takes no blame on his failure or refusal to perform as desired by Christians. This is Biblically incorrect because God is seen getting angry and even punishing people in the Bible.
5. Popular Christologies constructions among the Christians of Ndia are largely Biblically incorrect hence heretic.

It is therefore important to highlight these significant notes that: *First*, Churches operating in Ndia ought to teach faithfuls such doctrinal positions. As regards the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ so as to avoid further drift into heresy. *Second*, the cause-effect relationship between work and wealth and medicine and healing ought to be emphasized among the Christians of Ndia so that overdependence on religion which might not serve all the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may stop. *Third*, the over-emphasis on the power of Satan who even stops Jesus from operating the way he should needs to be discouraged by church leaders because it can lead ignorant people to devil worship with all its resultant dangers. *Fourth*, the position of the traditional Gikuyu deity, Ngai, ought to be protected and re-interpreted in the light of the Christian message so that Ngai may take the place of God the father as opposed to the place of God the Son in the Christian construction of a "wholesome" Gikuyu theology.

## DISCUSSION

The Christians of Ndia have been fully Christianized. Christ is already in the Ndia culture. This Christ is perceived differently by different people depending on their culture and experience. An assessment of the existing popular Christology among the Agikuyu of Ndia calls for both a sympathetic approach in the recognition that Christ is already in the culture and a more radical approach to help in saving the culture from degenerating into heresy.



New begin (1989) argues that true contextuality happens when there is a community of believers that lives faithfully by the Gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Considering that the Agikuyu of Ndia live in a Christian culture, it is imperative that the Ndia are confronted by the authority and judgment of Christ before their popular Christologies are declared doctrinally sound or not. This can best be done through the praxis model because it recognizes the Christ in culture but does not ignore the “Christ above culture” as identified by Neibuhr (1952).

By the praxis model again, cultures are judged critically according to the standards of the Gospel and the praxis theologians commit themselves to changing social structures that do not measure up (Bevans: 2005). This extended to the Agikuyu of Ndia popular Christology allowed the study to both sympathize with and criticize these Christological constructions.

### **Christology Church History**

The subject of Christology is traceable right from the beginning of time in the Christian tradition where time starts with creation (Genesis, 1 – 2). It runs through the time of Abraham where Abraham meets Melchizedek the king of Salem (Genesis 14: 18 – 20) who symbolizes Christ, through the prophets (Nathan, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Psalmist), gets into the New Testament (Gospels, Acts, Letters, Apocalyptic), the church history and into the modern times. Most of the scriptures pointing out the Christ in the Old Testament are written by New Testament writers in support of Old Testament writers.

Being the biblical phase ushered in by Jesus himself, the New Testament can be said to be a Christological covenant. Everything in the New Testament happens by or for Christ. In the Gospels, Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. The New Testament contains a plurality of Christologies. These Christologies reflect the

particular context from which they were written. They have their own particular emphasis. Prominent of these Christologies are those associated with Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke, John and the unknown author of Hebrews. These Christologies regard Jesus as God, Son of God, First born, Savior, Son of man, The logos, and the way (Walker: 2002).

The New Testament Jesus died and then rose from the dead. He then ascended into heaven. Disputations regarding this Jesus centre on interpretation of New Testament descriptions. Some take the words symbolically others literally. A literal interpretation of scriptures has been taken in this chapter.

Christological debates in the history of the church began during the early apostolic period and have extended to the modern times. Several writers have expounded on the concept and discipline of Christology from different dimensions. Some explore the historical development of the subject while others take particular theological themes and expound on them. However, it is important to note that it is the question of Christology that has more than anything else pre-occupied the mind of Christianity over the ages. Henry Chadwick (1967) says that all Christian communities were linked by the foundational events that occurred in Jerusalem and continued to be of defining importance in the forging of doctrinal orthodoxy.

The doctrinal orthodoxy Chadwick alludes to mainly concerns the trinity. Debates raged, some splitting the church, others leading to death, hard positions were taken, until finally, an agreed doctrinal orthodoxy, though questionable today, was taken at Constantinople in AD 381 (Mac Grath, 1985, Chadwicks, 1967). This ‘common doctrinal orthodoxy’ finds little support in history because less than fifty years after the Constantinople (AD 381) council, and less than a century after the Nicaea (AD 325), two councils that purportedly settled the question of the deity of Christ, Nestorius Bishop of Constantinople opposed the *theotokos* doctrine that held Mary the bearer of God.

Nestorius thought that God could not have a new beginning, or suffer or die. Therefore instead of God-man, there was the logos and the “man was assumed”. Nestorius saw Mary as the bearer of Christ (*christotokos*) (Grillmeir, 1965). Nestorius main opponent was Bishop Cyril who argued about a “hypostatic union” in order to emphasize the oneness of God. Cyril politicized the matter so that a general council was called out Ephesus in AD 431. The council approved Cyril’s doctrine. The Easterners who had not arrived at the AD 431 meeting by the time the resolutions were passed were outraged and set up a rival council. They in turn condemned Cyril. Cyril re-convened the council and re-condemned Nestorius with the support of Rome. Nestorius was exiled. The Eastern churches largely remained Nestorian (Grillmeir: 1965).

Eutyches (AD 375 –AD 454) from Constantinople was not satisfied with the situation following the condemnation of Nestorius. He began to teach Monophysitism, that is, Christ has one nature. Eutyches did not acknowledge the human nature of Christ but only that “his body is consubstantial with ours” (Bettenson, 1978: 48). According to Eutyches, the humanity of Jesus was absorbed by the divinity.

Flavian the Bishop of Constantinople summoned Eutyches to a synod in November AD 448. Eutyches maintained that his doctrine was orthodox but despite his plea of innocence Eutyches was condemned and Flavian sent news to Pope Leo of Rome. In response Pope Leo further condemned Eutyches and expounded on the doctrine of Christ (Kelly: 1977). The document Pope Leo compiled came to be known as the Tome of Leo. The Tome of Leo was later adopted at the council of Chalcedon as an orthodox statement.

Upon the condemnation of Eutyches, Theodosius II called another “Council of Ephesus” in AD 449. This council was dominated by Dioscorus the Bishop of Alexandria and who was a supporter of Eutyches. The council reinstated Eutyches, condemned Flavian and

excommunicated Leo. Flavian was beaten to death three days later. Leo dismissed the council and called it the “Robber council.” Upon the death of Theodasius, the council of Chalcedon was called. The council re-condemned Eutyches, condemned Dioscorus, declared Flavian a martyr and supported the Tome of Leo and Cyrus’s arguments against Nestorius. The council wrote a new creed called the Definition of Chalcedon (Kelly: 1977).

The Latin speaking Western Church and the Greek speaking Eastern Church regarded the definition of Chalcedon as their pronouncement of doctrinal orthodoxy. Those who opposed this doctrinal statement were regarded heretic and are mostly referred to as monophysites because of their insistence on “one nature” (Mc Brien, 1984: 446 – 48). Pope Honorius and Emperor Heraclius attempted to bridge the gap between the two sides by taking a central position whereby they recognized the two natures of Christ. However, the third council of Constantinople condemned their teaching.

Later following the collapse of the Roman Empire after attacks from Germanic tribes, the church became too powerful that it was able to consolidate and force people to subscribe to the Chalcedon definition. Save for small groups that endured persecution the vast majority accepted the church’s central position. Even after the reforms in the church during renaissance which culminated to the Great Lutheran Protestation of 1517, the definition of Chalcedon was not challenged. It remains the most dominant doctrinal pronouncement of orthodoxy in the Christian faith to this day (2015). The modern task of the Christological debate is hence informed by the need for the contextualization of the faith more than the desire to challenge the orthodox doctrine as argues (Newbigin, 1989: 154) “True conceptuality happens when there is a community which lives faithfully by the Gospel and in that same costly identification with people in their real situations as we see in the earthy ministry of Jesus.” We thus now turn to “contextualization of Christology”

## Contextualization of Christology

Modern Christological debates can be regarded as subjects in the field of contextual theology. All Christian theology is Christological as Hall (1993: 493) puts it “Christology is central to any belief that is professed Christian. It is a basis and criterion in relation to which all other themes of Christian theology are constructed”. The understanding of Christology opens up the route to considering the very nature of Christian identity.

Hendry (1969) declares that Christology is always an interpretation of the significance of Jesus Christ for the Christian community in a particular time and place. Sabrino (1978) adds that every Christology is elaborated within the context of a specific situation. Thus there is no Christology without context.

If one is concerned to proclaim the Christ message to any people, the cultural heritage and the historical realities of the particular people cannot be ignored. Their popular perception and world view forms the main frame work of cultural influence on new religious ideas. The Gospel message becomes a transforming power within the life of a community when it is expressed in the cultural forms in which the community understands it (Gill, 1983). This calls for the need to do contextual Christologizing if the Gospel is to take root in the communities especially in the non-western regions such as Africa.

Christianity came to Africa “not simply carrying the Gospel but a complex phenomenon made up of western culture, politics and new methods of conquering nature” (Mbiti 1969: 216). The Christianity inherited by Africans from Western Europe could hardly resonate with the Africans social and cultural realities. There has thus been a need for construction of African theologies that can help in the indigenization of the Christian faith. According to Setiloane (2000), the task of Africa theology is to grapple seriously with the central question of Christology.

Mugambi (1989) emphatically states that the Christian Gospel ought to assist African

Christians to live more abundantly as Africans. He points out that the norm of African Christian theology cannot be determined or defined by anyone else but Africans who have experienced the power of the Gospel. Mbiti (2003) argues that Theology started in Africa during the Apostolic age then grew steadily until it was launched in January 1966 at Immanuel College in Ibadan Nigeria. Mbiti explains that the Ibadan conference should be regarded as the first formal acknowledgement of African theology in modern times. Agbeti (1972) argues that Africa theology should be confined to African religion. Nyamiti (1973) called for a broad conception of Africa and went on to point out the relevance of culture.

Debates and literatures about African Christian theology (and Christology) have raged since the Ibadan Conference (1966). Some scholars have devoted themselves to the subject, meanwhile others went the “Pure African way” and have studied African Religion itself and presented its theology. Among these scholars are Agbeti, Bediako, Busia, Chitandi, Gitau, Kato, Kibicho, Idowu, Mugambi, Maluleke, Muzorewa, Nthamburi and Pobee. J.B Chipenda, A. Karamanga and C. K Omari co-worked with Mugambi in the production of *The Church in Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction* (1991) whereby they underscored the need for a more responsible theological construction in African contexts.

The most important of African theologies for the purpose of this study is the inculturation theology. African Christologies are basically a call for the inculturation of the gospel. Inculturation is a term used in Christian missiology to refer to the adoption of the ways the gospel is presented for the specific cultures being evangelized. Inculturation and indigenization are different only on the semantics. The Roman Catholics prefer to use the term “inculturation” while Protestants seem to favour the term “indigenization” to refer to the same works.

African Christianity is a continuing “narrative” and can thus be hardly exhausted. Fortunately for Africa, practical theologians, missionaries and clergy and laity serving in the churches are today doing actual inculturation and applying contextual christologies on the ground.

### **Christologies Among Christians of Ndia**

Ndia Christologies are founded on the concept of Jesus Christ as the “new Gikuyu Ngai (God)” and as the ideal elder (Wachege, 1992) and the works of this Ngai and ideal elder–Jesus. Other than Wachege construction of the Gikuyu Christology based on Agikuyu elderhood, there exist no formal christologies among the Agikuyu of whom the Ndia are a sub-tribe. The formal writings on Agikuyu religious life basically centre on the Agikuyu history. Anthropological pieces such as Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* (1989) are reprints of social history today.

John Karanja (1999) and Julius Gathogo (2002) are, among others, historical and ecclesiological accounts that do not address Christology as a subject. Josiah Murage (2011) is more pastoral and psychological in its dealing with the subject of Utugi (hospitality) and its application on HIV/AIDs context among the Agikuyu. Gatheru (1964) and Kibicho (1972) address religious and theological aspects of the Agikuyu social life but do not address Christological issues specifically. Wachege (1992) addresses christologies among the Agikuyu but confines himself to his own suggestions and constructions thereby failing to capture popular Agikuyu Christologies.

Ndia Christianity differs from Christian inhabited by the Agikuyu in that Ndia was mainly evangelized by Africans as a result, many traditional aspects of culture such as tobacco sniffing, traditional brews, polygamy and elaborate dowry settlements proceedings which are not tolerated in the churches in the Mount Kenya region, are tolerated in Ndia churches. Christologies among the Christians of

Ndia can be categorized into three sub-divisions: Ontological Christologies, Soteriological Christologies and functional Christologies, with the anti-thesis Christology forming the fourth category. Ontological Christologies deal with the person and being of Jesus Christ. Soteriological formulations deal with the quest and desire for salvation while functional Christologies deal with perceived tasks of Jesus Christ. Functional Christologies are further categorized into social, economic and political constructions. The fourth category which is the anti-thesis of Christology is Christodicy. Christodicy is concerned with the perceived failure or refusal by Jesus to intervene (Gary: 2004).

Based on the data analyzed, the researcher found out the following;

1. The divinity of Christ eclipses the humanity of Jesus among the Christians of Ndia. Only 18,81% the respondents in the study indicated concepts that are close to humanity, Jesus an ancestor at 17,4% and Jesus as king at 1,41%. 48,1% of the respondents indicated that Jesus was God and 26,4% indicated that Jesus was unknowable. It was noted that Jesus had taken the place of the traditional Gikuyu God, *Ngai* in the popular religious life of the Christian of Ndia. This total acceptance of Christ, to a point where the traditional deity is total replaced by Christ, fits into Bevans (2005) idea of a culture that would require the praxis model in development of contextual theologies. The emphasis of the divinity of Christ at the expense of the humanity of Jesus sharply contrasts the biblical presentation of Jesus of history. The biblical Jesus is presented as both God and man. Popular Christologies among Christians of Ndia also fail to capture the place of Jesus in the trinity (union of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) and the central theme of the God-focused, Christ-centered and spirit-saturated New Testament. (Schreiner, 2008).



2. 99,5% of Ndia Christians regarded Jesus as their Savior while the remaining 0,5% who did not know whether Jesus was their savior interestingly identified reasons for Jesus being a savior. This indicates that Jesus was regarded as savior by all Christians in Ndia. Jesus saved Ndia people Christians from sin, poverty, disease, colonialism and political dictatorship. The findings indicate a well-balanced perception of soteriological aspect of Jesus Christ. This “completeness” in the understanding of the sacrificial nature of Christ agrees with Boff (1999) that acceptance of Jesus should be total and that Jesus “vision” of the Kingdom of God is a place where people are saved from oppression and dehumanization. The findings also agree with the Biblical teachings about the balance between the spiritual and the secular-give to Ceaser what belongs to Ceaser and to God what belongs to God. The liberative Concept of Christ in Ndia also finds agreement with Mbiti’s (1969) argument that African spiritually cannot be separated from the physical universe. Turaki’s (2001) argument that the concept of reality and destiny are deeply rooted in the spirit would be applicable to the Ndia Christians’ world view. Liberation from secular and temporal realities and the promise of life on earth are determined by the spirituality of the people-the Ndia Christians. Hence Christ permeates all spheres of the lives of Ndia Christians.
3. There were social, political and economic categories of functions of Christ among the Christians of Ndia. There was a strong balance between the functions because each category had a third of the respondents indicating the role of Jesus. Despite the fact that female respondents constituted a majority 58% while their male counterparts constituted the remaining 42% the findings agreed with one feminist theologian Mercy Odugoye who indicates that feminism is not a word for the female but is a mixture of things, values and temperaments dichotomized into feminine and masculine (Odugoye, 1982) and so there does not need to appear the word women, female or girl for gender consciousness to be said to be manifested. The “giver of children” concept function of Christ at 12,5% and the “holder of marriage” at 38,8% indicate aspects where both genders must be uniformly engaged. Since gender and femininity are inseparable, the findings of the study indicated the gender parity.
4. The liberative nature of functional Christologies among the Ndia Christians indicate that after liberation new systems are put in place. The renewal of society after liberation is reconstructionist. These findings indicate that Reconstructionist ideologies such as Mugambi’s call for contextual theologies that are more constructionists than liberative (Mugambi, 1995) have already been overtaken by popular theological formulations that are able to combine both liberative and reconstructionist views and apply them to the needs of day-to-day survival. The economic functional Christologies indicate that just as was in the case of the 1930s when land and agricultural issues could not be divorced from the religious social and political events of the Gikuyu life (Kenyatta, 1989) so is the case today for land, growth of crops, safety and health of animals, eradication of poverty and giving prosperity were the economic functions of Jesus to the Christians of Ndia.
5. 82,6% of the respondents had at one point been failed by Jesus. 72% of those who indicate those who had been failed by Jesus blamed Satan for Jesus’ failure. Only 28% blamed failure on their side. All who indicated that Jesus had failed had a reason for his failure. The findings agree with Mbiti (1969) and Kenyatta (1989) who assert that Africans in general (Mbiti, 1969) and Agikuyu in particular (Kenyatta, 1989)

draw ready answers to difficult questions which would otherwise be unanswerable from religion. The

blame on Satan finds agreement with Biblical teachings in Genesis where Satan is presented as a cunning being that made the first human being disobey God. In the traditional religion, evil forces operated side by side with good forces (Kenyatta, 1989). The Satan idea is thus not too foreign in the Gikuyu culture which the Ndia are part. This view of Jesus failing because of Satan is however not balanced with other causes of failure such as lack of faith, laziness and wrong motive in prayer which find very little blame. Thus Christodicy among Ndia Christians gives Satan too much prominence.

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